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The collective in the Hungarian narrative tradition and narrative studies

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Abstract

Although Gérard Genette mentioned the possibility of a collective narrator as a version of the narrator as witness only in a footnote of his *Narrative discourse*, narrative theory started showing vivid interest in collective narratives and narration about two decades ago. This paper looks at a kind of Hungarian narrative tradition in this context. In that tradition the collective voice of a community is frequently heard, a voice that usually cannot be attached to any particular speaker, but expresses a collective knowledge, the collective interpretation and evaluation of events and persons. Herczeg (*A modern magyar próza stílusformái* [Stylistic forms in the Hungarian modernist prose], Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1975) coined the expression "communis opinio" to describe this narrative tool, and it was welcomed by some Hungarian narratologists, criticised by others. This usage of "communis opinio" has nothing to do with common sense; it rather explains opinions that do not belong to just one person, but to a community. The paper discusses Herczeg's ideas and describes the related phenomena in Kálmán Mikszáth's *The good people of Palocz*, where the interplay of various collective voices creates not only the representation of a collective mind (although Palmer's results can be very fruitfully applied here), but also the impression that the community disposes over a collective treasury of stories, any piece of which can be told by and to members of the community when the occasion of storytelling is given.

Keywords Narratology · Collective narrator · Joseph Conrad · Communis opinio · Mikszáth

The term 'narrator' goes back to an ancient Latin word and therefore has some implications that are too obvious to be mentioned frequently, if ever. A narrator by

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default is a singular male entity. We never use the possible female counterpart (*narratrix), although we know that a personal narrator can be female. An impersonal omniscient narrator is theoretically genderless, but again, by default is supposed to be male, especially if sticking to the general rules of logic, value system, and common sense of a patriarchal society. It is possible for a literary text to use several narrators one after another, but each part is generally expected to be narrated by a single narrator. Despite these implications of the singular male grammatical form of the word 'narrator', recently some attention has been paid to narrative forms that express various kinds of collective experience.[1] It is small wonder that Gérard Genette, who in his *Narrative discourse* tried to take into consideration all the theoretical possibilities, wrote only a footnote on the possibility of a collective narrator as a version of the narrator as witness. According to Genette, the homodiegetic narrator has two types, "one where the narrator is the hero of his narrative (*Gil Blas*) and one where he plays only a secondary role, which almost always turns out to be the role as observer and witness" (Genette 1980, 245). Then a footnote about the second type reads as follows: "A variant of this type is the narrative with a collective witness as narrator: the crew of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus',* the inhabitants of the small town in 'A Rose for Emily'. We remember that the opening pages of *Bovary* are written in this mode." (*Ibid.*)

Faulkner's short story and approximately three pages from Flaubert (only the first introduction of Charles Bovary as a child) may suggest that a collective narrator is appropriate for shorter texts or minor parts of a text. Since Conrad's novel may be an important counterexample, I would like to look at it first. Only some parts of the narration make use of a "we" associated with the narrator(s). Long parts of the narrative are told by an impersonal, sort of omniscient voice, the impact of which is most obvious in the scene that recounts Jimmy Wait's death. Only two persons are present in a closed room, one of them dies by the end of the scene, the other, Donkin has every reason never to tell anybody what happened between them. In this scene, however, Donkin's thoughts and inner fears are also reported, obviously not by a collective narrator. In the last couple of pages of the novel the narration switches to I-narrative, which gives the impression that the whole story was told by a witness who felt a part of a community during the journey and did not make a difference between the I and the other members of the crew sooner than seeing them for the last time in his life. Therefore this *we* can be interpreted as *I+them*, which belongs to the first category of Natalya Bekhta's threefold typology of we-references in narration, not to be regarded as a "we-narrative" (Bekhta 2017, 166).[2]

Brian Richardson came to a different conclusion about the "we" in Conrad's novel. According to his analysis it starts as a they-narration, and the "we" appears when "a common bond develops among the seamen," but it does not include the

[1] The 2017 second issue of *Narrative* might be regarded as summarizing the recent research in this direction.

[2] The other types are "multiperson narratives, in which the narration fluctuates between individual and plural references," and proper we-narratives, in which collective subjectivity defines the dominant mode of narration" *(ibid.).*

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officers, Donkin, James Wait, Singleton, or the boatswain (Richardson 2015, 201). At the end, when the community of the seamen disintegrates, because after getting paid everyone goes his own way, "an 'I' narrator suddenly intrudes the text," and the collective narration is over (Richardson 2015, 202). In the middle, however, there are also "unnatural" discrepancies between the omniscient and personal modes of narration, which make the narrator "simultaneously homodiegetic and heterodiegetic" (*ibid.* 202–203). These discrepancies, these unnatural features of the narrative are highly appreciated by Richardson: to represent the social mind of the crew Conrad had to invent new narrative techniques, since traditional realism did not seem to work.

I would like to make two comments. First, it is not infrequent, even in the most traditional realist narratives, that modes of personal and omniscient narration glide into each other. Omniscient narrators sometimes tell something they do not know, or only imply it by speculating about what might be the reason of this or that; I-narrators can easily report the thoughts of others or reveal hidden causes. Second, the agent-narrator-witness, the I part of the 'I + them = we' can be isolated in the plot. He is one of the party of five that go forward to save Jimmy in the crucial scene of distress in Chapter Three. We know this not only because the narrative follows their expedition while the others are waiting, but also because of sentences like "We went to work." (Conrad 2006, 52). Do we know who the members of this rescue expedition are? All members except one are named:

> The long-armed and athletic boatswain swung quickly, gripping things with a fist hard as iron, and remembering suddenly snatches of the last letter from his "old woman." Little Belfast scrambled in a rage spluttering "cursed nigger." Wamibo's tongue hung out with excitement; and Archie, intrepid and calm, watched his chance to move with intelligent coolness. (51)

The boatswain, Belfast, Wamibo, Archie, and an unnamed fifth person. And when they have to go down the carpenter's shop to get Jimmy, it reads

> Belfast howled "Here goes!" and leaped down. Archie followed cannily, catching at shelves that gave way with him, and eased himself in a great crash of ripped wood. There was hardly room for three men to move. *(Ibid.)*

The boatswain and Wamibo stay upstairs, therefore the unnamed fifth is among the three (referred to as us repeatedly) with Belfast and Archie. Therefore, I would rather say that *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* has a personal witness as narrator who speaks as "I" on the last pages, tries to formulate a collective experience many times, but also slips into narrative omniscience regularly.

This kind of isolation of the *I* among the *we* is not possible in Genette's other examples. The voice that speaks in the name of the schoolmates of the young Bovary does not seem to represent the social mind of the boys. And when the voice of the personal witness(es) disappears or glides into narrative omniscience, this can be regarded as a typical (although maybe unnatural) move of realism. "A rose for Emily" is still regarded as "a paradigmatic example of we-narrative" (Bekhta 2017, 169), in which the community can be omniscient, so to speak,

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because so many people look at, listen to and try to find out what is going on in Emily's house, and they communicate with each other (Bekhta 2017, 171), while the *we* has a really collective, although not fixed, referent, sometimes covering several generations, sometimes people being in the same room (Margolin 2001, 245), and can be subdivided by gender (Fludernik 2017, 142).

In the recent years narratologists have shown vivid interest in the collective in narrative, be it collective action (performed by a group on plot level), collective thought of a group with shared attitude, or collective narration (Fludernik 2017, 141). Collective action may abound in factual narratives (*ibid*. 140, 143–146), but it is not infrequent in fictional genres either, although collective narrative agents and their collective actions usually appear accidentally in the background. Therefore, according to Uri Margolin, only those narratives should be regarded as collective in which a collective narrative agent is the protagonist (Margolin 2000, 494–495).[3] For narrative agents he offers a typology of five categories: (A) group of individuals with one single shared characteristic, like in Doyle's "The red-headed league;" (B) a temporarily and more or less randomly assembled number of people, like in a crowd, or the deportees in Borowski's "This way for the gas, ladies and gentlemen;" (C) a group with a shared intention to act jointly, like in Greene's "The Destructors;" (D) a group with a shared identity; (E) a strictly organised and controlled corporate entity. Only type (C), (D), and (E) can play the role of the protagonist in a real collective narrative.

Collective thoughts and attitudes may cause epistemological problems, especially in first-person narratives, since the narrator can be sure of an experience like "we ran," but not of "we felt" (Margolin 2000, 599). Nothing guarantees that a predication of a collective narrative agent applies to every or any particular member,[4] therefore it is obvious that in what concerns thoughts, feelings or attitudes, hypothetical generalization plays a central role in narrative statements. This can be challenging when a narrator speaks in the name of huge collectives, like in Richard Wright's *12 million black voices,* which was attacked by many who did not feel or did not wish to be subsumed in that "we."[5] Writers who seek to express the voice of minority groups tend to keep a double audience in mind, speaking to those included and not included in the group simultaneously (Richardson 2011, 13–15). Amit Marcus demonstrated that, in harsh contrast to such homogenising narratives, we-narratives

3FL01 [3] Indexes of a collective narrative are as follows: title; repeated list of members of the group; collective
3FL02 verbs; the group being mentioned first, only then and accidentally the individuals; the individual appears
3FL03 only as a member of the group and individual actions are evaluated from the viewpoint of the collec-
3FL04 tive (Margolin 2000, 495–496). Margolin's ideas of the representation of collective consciousness, which
3FL05 resulted in the statement that not marginal collective narratives are rare, has been severely criticised by
3FL06 Marcus (2008a, 48–52).

4FL01 [4] Frigyes Karinthy's (1917) short story "Barabbás" offers an excellent illustration of this. While all the
4FL02 individuals cry the name of Jesus, the crowd together cries Barrabas, and while Jesus recognises all the
4FL03 faces individually, the crowd's collective face is evil and arrogant.

5FL01 [5] For a selection of critiques see Richardson (2015, 205). Although Richardson refutes such criticism
5FL02 because it is based on a mimetic reading of the text, in an endnote (p. 211, n. 5) he has to admit that
5FL03 "Natanson's charge (1992, 247) that Wright's voice was a male one is […] accurate."

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more frequently represent tensions between the individual and the (hegemonic) group (Marcus 2008b, 137). Most of his examples and all three types of discourse he identifies in we-narrative (namely authoritative, disorienting, and polyphonic) actually challenge group cohesion.[6]

Collective narration can be easily experienced in natural narratives (aka real life), and an obvious and well-analysed type is when couples tell about, say, their holiday adventures.[7] In literature a collective narration may need rather sophisticated techniques. The traditional *I + somebody-else* first-person-plural and the fluctuation between individual and plural references in multiperson narratives perhaps should not be regarded as we-narratives, only those in which a "collective subjectivity defines the dominant mode of narration" (Bekhta 2017, 166).[8] To create such a narration, however, seems to need experimental narrative techniques, which are likely to be found in modernist and post-modernist fiction (cf. Richardson 2011; Alber 2015).

Alan Palmer's notion of social mind can be connected both to collective thought and collective narration, although not necessarily at the same time. *Middlemarch,* the most brilliantly analysed example in Palmer's book, is not a we-narrative, and the town, referred to in third person, is "one of the most important characters" in the novel (Palmer 2010, 65), but not a narrator. Through their intermental functioning the inhabitants develop shared attitudes, interpretations, strategies, which can non-metaphorically be called a social mind. However, collective narrators tend to represent a social mind as well. A social mind functions through discussions, chats, gossiping of many groups and subgroups, all contributing to a multilevel, divided, colourful conglomerate of opinions, interpretations and values, which can appear as a social pressure on the individual.

Hungarian scholars analysing the Hungarian narrative tradition found and tried to describe something similar to what Palmer described as social mind, however, there seems to appear a narrative tool—especially in the works of Kálmán Mikszáth (1847–1910) but also in those inspired by his narrative technique throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—that calls for special attention, namely that the collective voice of a community is frequently heard even in third-person narratives that otherwise seem to use a simple mimetic code. It is a voice that cannot be attached to any particular speaker, but expresses a collective knowledge, the collective interpretation and evaluation of events and persons (or maybe the social mind). Gyula Herczeg (1975) coined the expression "communis opinio" to describe this phenomenon, and it was welcomed by Hungarian narratologists. For

6FL01 6FL02 6FL03 [6] In the case of authoritative discourse it seems a paradox, but after analysing one single example of real authoritative first-person-plural fiction, namely Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two thousand seasons* (139–140), he turns to pseudo-authoritative narratives, like Zamyatin's *We*.

7FL01 7FL02 [7] For a bibliography of discourse analyses of couples' narrative performance see Fludernik (2017, 156, n. 1).

8FL01 8FL02 8FL03 8FL04 [8] Bekhta's survey of possible we-references is rather similar to the options Susan Lanser lists for "communal voice:" "a singular form in which one narrator speaks for a collective [I+they], a simultaneous form in which a plural 'we' narrates [we-narrative proper], and a sequential form in which individual members of a group narrate in turn [multiperson narratives]" (Lanser 1992, 21).

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him, "communis opinio" is a version of Free Indirect Discourse developed by Mikszáth. It is probably disturbing that a term generally associated with common sense or beliefs and sentiments shared by most of the people, is in this usage attached to a (usually) small community. The fact that Herczeg used a Latin term may imply that the notion goes back to medieval if not ancient times, but he emphasised that it was a Hungarian invention in the nineteenth century. He wrote: "folkish writers[9] invented a new level of communication, which may be imperceptibly inserted in the author's[10] or perhaps in some characters' discourse" (Herczeg 1975, 54). As synonymous to *communis opinio* he sometimes uses the term collective commentary, and repeatedly uses a metaphor to explain it, namely that we hear the voice of an invisible choir. In Herczeg's book *Stylistic forms in the Hungarian modernist prose,* the analysis of the *communis opinio* occupies a strange position. The chapter on "folkish prose style" discusses *communis opinio* exclusively, and states that it is characteristic of a trend in Hungarian prose, which—broadly speaking—starts with István Tömörkény (1866–1917) and goes through Ferenc Móra (1879–1934) to Péter Veres (1897–1970), to Pál Szabó (1893–1970) or maybe to Ákos Kertész (1932–) (Herczeg 1975, 59). To this twelve-page chapter two endnotes are attached, one of them taking almost six pages (Herczeg 1975, 236–242) and discussing *communis opinio* in the writing of Kálmán Mikszáth. It is the longest endnote by far, taking up some 23% of the endnotes section of the whole book. Herczeg did not regard Mikszáth as a modernist writer, therefore he would not discuss him in the main body of his text. The main examples through which he describes in the endnote how Mikszáth invented this narrative tool are taken from the novel *A strange marriage,* published in 1900, while the main example of the tool in full blossom is the introductory part of a short story by Tömörkény written in 1908. The earliest example by Tömörkény, discussed in this chapter, goes back to 1901 (Herczeg 1975, 62). The shift from premodernist back story to the modernist main story must have been very sudden.

According to Herczeg, the collective commentary can hardly be longer than a couple of sentences, and usually is only a parenthetical clause inside a sentence. Let me quote how he describes the workings of a narrative that makes use of the *communis opinio*.

> The author's continuous presentation jolts here and there. We have the impression, although we cannot be sure, that it is not the author anymore who speaks, but somebody else. Readers have the impression that a community is listening to the writer, which implements some utterances, puts emphases, agrees or doubts things. Despite jolting, the presentation does not become a dialogue, not even free indirect discourse, from outside it still seems to stay on the level of authorial utterance. (55)

9FL01 [9] All the excerpts from Herczeg (and István Tömörkény quoted by Herczeg) are my translations. "Folkish writers" is a frustrated attempt in translating "népi írók," which is the name of a loose group of Hungarian authors in the twentieth century who ventured to represent (both politically and stylistically) the lower class rural population. In this terminology the term "folk" is in opposition both to "elites" and "city dwellers".

10FL01 [10] Herczeg does not make a difference between author and narrator.

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> [Such a parenthetical sentence] explains or evaluates previous events, as if the writer was delivering an oral presentation and the audience sometimes interrupted, had opinions, evaluated what is said, assented or judged. The author catches the words of the imaginary audience and embeds them in the process of the story without breaking its continuity. (56)

> … as if a collective speaker, the village or the family expressed their views. (56)

> The words of the invisible choir enter the discourse in the form of parenthetical insertion. (56)

The phenomenon can be better understood if we look at some short extracts Herczeg uses to illustrate the mechanism. His main example is a short story which starts with the death of a man, a hard working farmer, a good husband (even his name Joó means 'good'), father of several children, then focuses on his widow.

> If a neighbour woman accidentally happens to be there, she will comfort her. Most of the time one does. It is a woman's duty: to visit the sick, to support the orphans, comfort the widows. (Tömörkény 1958, 256)

The "jolting" is clearly visible here. The first sentence is said by the narrator, but the second and the third sentences utterly contradict the first. According to the narrator women from the neighbourhood may be there accidentally. Then it is firmly stated that the female presence is by no means accidental; women must be there, because it is the unwritten law of gender roles in the represented community. This voice of the community corrects only some circumstances without challenging the main narrative statement about the widow being comforted. Another example:

> Rozál—actually she is not young anymore—wanted to answer something, slowly and considerately, as befits to a peasant's wife when she speaks to her husband. (Tömörkény 1958, 255)

The remarks about Rozál's age and behaviour put the narrative on minor hold, and seem to belong to the community rather than the narrator. These remarks formulate general knowledge of the neighbourhood about the personnel of the story and the gender roles. The *communis opinio* uttered here does not belong to the whole of humanity but to a smaller community which populates the setting of the short story.

Gábor Bezeczky (1955–) wrote a CSc dissertation on the early short stories of Gyula Krúdy (1878–1933), in which he criticised Herczeg's theory of *communis opinio* (Bezeczky 1992, 70–72) and elaborated his own theory on the viewpoint of the community (*ibid.* 57–59), which he used and developed further in his later career. In 2012, for example, he used the term "viewpoint of a collective consciousness" (*köztudatos nézőpont,* Bezeczky 2012, 344). Herczeg's weak point, according to Bezeczky, is that he basically uses a framework of a binary opposition between author and character, therefore he cannot account for the fine tunes in the narrator's voice. That is why he has to imagine the invisible choir when an utterance cannot be attributed either to the author (who cannot be so naïve, for example) or the characters (who cannot reflect on themselves from the outside). Instead of this dichotomy

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Bezeczky describes the narrative strategy of Krúdy's early short stories through a plurality of viewpoints. The narration tend to start from the viewpoint of a witness, who appears as a member of a community (a village or a minor region). If the witness plays any role in the narrated events, which rarely happens, that role must be minor and insignificant (Bezeczky 1992, 56). It is not infrequent that the witness's viewpoint appears only in the very first sentence, while other viewpoints, primarily that of the collective, prevail in the rest of the text. The narrator tells what "everybody knew" in the given area, which may easily mean reporting gossip, fame, legend, superstition (Bezeczky 1992, 57), but the first person plural of verbs expressing knowledge or opinion is also characteristic of this discourse. For some parts of the short stories, however, an omniscient narrator's viewpoint or that of a character also tends to appear, which are both usually limited to one or two scenes or some thoughts of a character). Readers have to construct the plot on the basis of the rich interplay of many viewpoints without finding definitive statements in the text. Typically readers can feel that they know more than any individual member of the community, including the witness narrator.

This description implies that a typical early short story by Krúdy does not only tell a maybe interesting story that may have happened in a community; it also tells about how knowledge is produced in that community. Since all the possible viewpoints are limited, the stories seem rather skeptical about the validity of this kind of knowledge, while suggesting that it is the shared knowledge that creates the community.

It is hardly a coincidence that the examples of the collective voice or viewpoint are mostly taken from literary texts (by Tömörkény or Krúdy, respectively) that have rural areas as their setting. If a community should be represented, that presupposes a geographical closeness, and also a social similarity. A village is particularly appropriate for this, as is a group of farms or a couple of neighbouring villages. But a small town is also a possibility, as in some examples Herczeg took from Mikszáth's novel *Kísértet Lublón* (The Lubló ghost, 1892), which is set in a very small town on the Hungarian-Polish border (Ľubovňa in Slovak).[11]

This kind of representation of minor regional communities has a long and continuing tradition in Hungarian literature, and Kálmán Mikszáth, especially with his short story cycle *The good people of Palocz* (1882),[12] appears to have played the role of the founding father. The beginning of "Heathen Master Filcsik" can more or less be described with Palmer's toolkit of the social mind:

[11] The criterion of small town setting also applies to Middlemarch and the town of "A rose for Emily", one of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County stories, which together represent the reality of a rather backward, rural area. A big city is not to be represented as having a social mind (*pace* Margolin 2001, 596–597).

[12] Originally published in 1882 in Hungarian. A complete English translation was published in 1890 without any indication of the name of the translator(s) (Mikszáth 1890), a big format book with color pictures, which is hardly accessible nowadays. The name of the author was printed as Coloman Mikszáth. The title on the hard cover was *The good peopla of Pawlocz,* while inside *The good poeple of Palöcz*. Only six of the fifteen stories are printed in a relatively recent bilingual (German and English) edition (Mikszáth 1993), which is also available online; the title is *The good people of Palocz*.

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> There is a foolish and current rumour all over Csolt-Majornok, and Bodok that the famous fur-cloak of old Master Filcsik is only a figment of his imagination; he speaks of it, he boasts concerning it, he puts it on, but as a matter of fact he has no fur-cloak, and in all likelihood never had one.
>
> Yet he once had one. The inhabitants of Gozon (he moved into our midst from beyond the Bágy stream) very well recollect it, especially the elder ones. (Mikszáth 1890, 35.)

The rumour (literally: suspicion) is obviously something (based on gossip) that is characteristic of the social mind of the Palocz (or in this case a subset of them who live in three villages), and when the narrator says "in all likelihood [literally: maybe] never had one," he quotes the rumour, i.e. an unnamed authority, a gossiping member of the community, or rather an opinion repeated by several members several times. This unmarked quotation can also be described with Herczeg's term of "communis opinio," a kind of free indirect discourse, the general idea of the community. In the second paragraph, however, the narrator declares with an impressive epistemological certainty (a position already implied when the narrator called the suspicion "foolish") that (s)he knows the truth: Filcsik had a fur-cloak. This certainty is immediately refuted by using first-person-plural; the narrator is either one of those Palocz who live on "this" side of the Bágy or the collective voice of those who know what older people in Gozon remember. At the end of the story this narrator will tell how Filcsik got rid of his famous fur cloak by placing it over a sleeping beggar woman, an act witnessed only by the stars above. The story could have been constructed or reconstructed by the social mind of the Palocz on the basis of partial pieces of information. And the narrator appears as a mind that knows the complete set of stories stored in a collective memory. Or to put it another way: the narrator in this short story cycle is the collective memory.

The beginning of the story "The marvel of Bágy" seems even more complex. It starts with a depiction of the mill at the Bágy stream, where many customers are waiting, since the lack of water means their grain cannot be ground.

> Everybody is angry; only the miller's wife, the beautiful Clara Ver, walks around smiling among her customers, although hers is the greatest damage caused by the drought.
>
> If this state of things continues the miller of Bágy must be ruined, especially if he remains away any length of time in the army camp, because the rent is high, and a woman is, after all, but a woman, although she may wear gilt braided chemisettes.
>
> This opinion is not passed over without a remark from Mistress Michael Piller from Gozon.
>
> "The miller chose his wife carefully. Am I not right, Sophie Timar? Although I could not put my hands into the fire for her, because of the red hair. Oh, well, red hair!" (Mikszáth 1890, 43.)

As it seems Mrs Piller starts an argument with the narrator. However, the present tense suggest that the narrator was not thinking on his or her own about the

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state of things and the future of the miller, but quoted in free indirect discourse the chat of the many angry people waiting in the mill, and that is why Mrs Piller could disagree with an opinion which may belong to several people. Her remark and then Sophie Timár's answer to it also contribute to the construction of general ideas about Clara Vér, or to the social mind.

The discourse of the first-person-singular narrator of the story "The Virgin Mary in Gozon," who speaks to second-person-plural addressees, is interspersed with remarks of the audience or with his or her (but maybe rather her than his) references to the general opinions. Here is the enumeration of the people frequenting the procession in Gózon:

> From Bágy many had come. Sophie Timar dressed in black from head to heel, old Joseph Bizi, Mistress Böngér, even godless Stephen Filcsik had come with his entire household (Surely this world is taking a turn!). There was also flirting Clara Ver (Is she not afraid to come, people? The shameless one!); and who could remember all the rest? There they were, good and bad ones among them, and I need hardly state expressly that, Annie Gughi and Gabriel Csucz were there too. (Mikszáth 1890, 64.)

With the exception of Mrs. Böngér (who only appears in a couple of lines in the story "The little boots"), the people mentioned in this list are protagonists of other short stories.[13] Either we hear a first-person-singular narrator with interlocutions of the addressees, or a collective, multiperson narration, or the first-person-singular with Herczeg's "invisible choir;" this narrating entity knows all the stories about all the characters, but carefully chooses when and what to share. The narration easily surfs in time, taking any past horizon depending on the temporary needs of storytelling. This functioning of the collective memory can be demonstrated already through the opening piece of that cycle, called "The lamb that was." It begins in the first person singular, a form which will not reappear in the story:

> I begin with the summer evening when at Bodak the bells were tolled to dispel the over-shadowing clouds. Poor Joe Csuri! The palms of his hands became full of blisters ere he succeeded in driving the dark anger of God from the vicinity. (Mikszáth 1890, 3)

A witness seems to narrate the story, but a witness who shares the beliefs of superstitious village people who think that the tempest is the anger of God, which can be dispelled by bells. The narration also implies a collective narratee of oral communication[14] who do not need any additional information about the name of an (otherwise fictional) village Bodak or the person Joe Csuri, to which the narrator shows sympathy. This narrator seems to possess a whole treasury of stories

[13] Sophie Timár in "Sophie Timár's widowhood," Joseph Bizi in "The little boots," Stephen Filcsik in "Heathen Master Filcsik," and Clara Vér in "The marvel of Bágy" and "The horses of poor John Gélyi".

[14] For the importance of oral narrative tradition in short stories see Pratt (1981, 189–191). For the oral tradition's influence on the non-linear, network-like nature of short story sequences representing small communities see Wong (1995, 172–173).

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belonging to the community of some neighbouring villages, and it is an arbitrary decision where to begin the storytelling; this time a decision is made to start the narration with that particular summer evening. The implied addressees have to accept the decision that the narration starts in that particular day and village (time and space), but they are supposed to know the stories of all the days and villages anyway. Real readers, however, have to take a hypothetical position as if they knew everything. The narration will entail the necessary information piece by piece, although never presented as new but as supposedly already known.

The first-person-singular narration disappears very soon, but the general impersonal narrator is not omniscient at all: for example, inner thoughts of individual characters are never reported. The narration rather shares what average members of the community might know. Or to put it another way, the narration is continuously shifting among different voices of the communal choir, or sounds different parts of the Palocz social mind.

Although the tempest was successfully diverted from Bodak, it caused damage elsewhere, and people thus spend the night fishing the belongings of Mayornok people out of the flooded creek. The narrator sometimes sticks to the knowledge the community can have at the given moment of the story, sometimes commutes freely in time. The shift in time may be connected with a shift in viewpoint.

> …something, which seemed to be a block of timber, was being rolled along by the waters.
>
> The moon's rays fell on it just then. It is not a block at all, but a gaily-painted chest, and see!—how astonishing!—how calmly a little lamb is resting on the top of it. (*Ibid.*)[15]

The narrator first speaks from the time of narration entailing what can be known of the past, namely what that something seemed and where the moon's rays fell. Then the narration suddenly shifts to the time of the narrated (in present tense), relating in free indirect discourse those who are standing by the creek, seeing the lamb in the moonlight. This collectivity of the represented experience becomes evident when the narration shifts back to the past tense when the chest does not reappear after a curve of the creek.

> For a time people watched it, wondering whether it would reappear at the corner. No; it is gone. Probably darkness has enshrouded it, or Paul Sós has fished it out with his pickaxe; but all this will be proved in the morning. (4.)

After one sentence in past tense the narration returns to the present (perfect) and even future to relate what people thought and probably said to each other while trying to cope with a minor mystery. The narration does not only sound what is known by the community, but also what is guessed or conjectured. Collective hypotheses become parts of the narrative too.

15FL01 [15] Translation modified.

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The narrator commutes freely not only between the times of the narration and the narrated, but also between different levels of narrated time. After recounting extensively how people were gossiping about what the trunk could have contained, the narrator says: "There was not a single farthing in the chest; but now it is known for certain that it contained the outfit of pretty Agnes Balo, of Mayornok" (4). Now it is known, yet at that time it was not known. A rich, respectable farmer is suspicious about the trunk, but the narratorial voice seems to have complete trust in him and in social hierarchy.

> However when questioned, this honourable gentleman said, "That while he was there he did not even see a trace of the little animal;" and it must be so, if such a respectable man says it—one who is a country squire this year, and next, if we live to see it, will become a Justice of the Peace. (4)

> How malicious the tongues were which wagged the very next day at the Thanksgiving Mass in the church! They only stopped while moistening their fingers to turn over the leaves of their prayer-books. Instead of gratefully acknowledging the goodness of God in not having smitten their village with the storm, they made use of their tongues as shovels, wherewith to dig up the good names of others. (4)

> And then the disgraceful thing occurred at Bodak—that the house of the wealthiest man was searched. (5)

The narrator, thanks to hindsight, should know that those malicious tongues were completely right and what the so-respectable man said was a lie. At this point, however, the narration identifies with that part of the community that respects wealth, refuses to believe anything bad of a respectable would-be-Justice of the Peace, and detests those who think otherwise. This position, however, can change from one sentence to another. When Agnes Baló tries to get back her stuff, the narrator summarises the unsuccessful attempt as follows:

> So it appeared Agnes' journey also was fruitless. No help came from the powerful arm of the Law, and none from artifice; for the craftiness of evil-doers is mightier than these. (5)

The general statement at the end of the sentence sounds like the voice of Herczeg's invisible choir; but here that collective choir, when commenting on Balós' suit against the respectable Paul Sós, seems sure that the rich man is one of the evil-doers.

A narration meanders through the collective knowledge of a small, locally bounded community and represents a story world from the viewpoint of that community. To achieve the collectiveness of the represented experience, this short story cycle (which had a still visible impact on the Hungarian narrative tradition) uses different techniques. Even if it sometimes uses the first person plural, I would not go so far as to call it a we-narrative. It definitely represents a social mind, but with astonishing frequency quoting a collective voice in free indirect discourse, and using collective focalisation.

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